



The Final Straw is a weekly anarchist and anti-authoritarian radio show bringing you voices and ideas from struggle around the world. Since 2010, we've been broadcasting from occupied Tsalagi land in Southern Appalachia (Asheville, NC).

We also frequently feature commentary (serious and humors) by anarchist prisoner, Sean Swain.

You can send us letters at:

The Final Straw Radio
PO Box 6004
Asheville, NC 28816
USA

Email us at:

thefinalstrawradio@riseup.net
or **thefinalstrawradio@protonmail.com**

To hear our past shows for free, visit:

<https://thefinalstrawradio.noblogs.org>

INDIGENOUS SPACE AND DECOLONIZING PRISON ABOLITION



The Final Straw Radio

The following is a transcription of a conversation with someone from Ni Frontiers Ni Prison, which is a group in so called Canada that is resisting the proposed construction of a new migrant prison in Laval, a town just outside of Montreal. In this interview we talk about the prison and what it would mean for people who'd be most affected by it, the general rise of far right sentiment in so called Canada, and many more topics.

Aired on March 31, 2019



The following is a transcription of a conversation with someone from Ni Frontiers Ni Prison, which is a group in so called Canada that is resisting the proposed construction of a new migrant prison in Laval, a town just outside of Montreal. In this interview we talk about the prison and what it would mean for people who'd be most affected by it, the general rise of far right sentiment in so called Canada, and many more topics.

The interviewee names the place they are based as occupied Tio'tia:ke (jo-jahg'-eh), which is the original indigenous name for so called Montreal, the colonizer name. The naming of indigenous land will continue throughout the interview with various locations in the name of decolonization, though Tio'tia:ke is the one which will be the most prominent.

To get in touch with this group you can email them at nifrontieresni-prisons@riseup.net and for updates and further ways to get involved you can find them at facebook.com/nifrontiersni-prison, or follow the link to visit the clearing house of information and pieces about this resistance.

This show mentions historical events mentioned by our guest relating to Canada's treatment of immigrants and refugees:

Chinese Head Tax, a policy which "meant to discourage Chinese people from entering Canada after the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway", a government project which I conjecture used a bunch of precarious and immigrant labor in order to complete.

Komagata Maru Incident, the historic entry denial of a group of Indian refugees seeking entry into Canada on the Japanese steamship Komagata Maru in 1914, resulting in the death of 20 Sikh people at the hands of the then occupying British government.

None Is Too Many policy for Jewish refugees fleeing the Holocaust, an anti Semitic stance that put people who were fleeing Nazi terror in further danger and possible death.

Links to more info about the above terms can be found online at <https://thefinalstrawradio.noblogs.org> by searching for the episode title.

images from the facebook page of Ni Frontiers Ni Prisons

The Final Straw Radio / Decolonizing Prison Abolition

TFSR: First of all, thank you so much for your time in coming onto this radio show! Could you first talk about what is attempting to be planned on the part of the Canadian state in terms of this migrant prison in Laval?

Ni Frontières Ni Prisons: Yeah! So the proposed new migrant prison is actually one part of a plan that the Canadian government announced just over two years ago now. It's called the National Immigration Detention Framework. And the plan came in response to a period of sustained resistance against the government's practice of incarcerating migrants, many in provincial jails. Um, and for years, going back to 2011, migrants held by the CBSA (which is the Canada Border Services Agency), had been going on periodic hunger strikes in facilities across Ontario. And in the months before the government's announcement of this plan a new hunger strike was initiated, and there were mobilizations across the country in solidarity. There was a lot of pressure on the government to do something, especially because several migrants had died in CBSA custody over that same period.

And so the government responds to all this by announcing a new \$138 million plan, but instead of ceding to the demands of the hunger strikers, most of the money ends up being dedicated to building two new migrant prisons, one in [Sur ABC] replacing the CBSA's Vancouver Airport Facility, and one in Laval replacing the current one just across the street. So strengthening the detention system that the hunger strikers were fighting against. Many detained migrants in Ontario actually went back on hunger strike following the announcement but the government just ignored them.

TFSR: Is there anything more to say about the sustained period of resistance on the part of people who were in custody and people who weren't in custody?

NFNP: Because it's been so long now I feel like I hesitate to talk

TFSR: Excellent, thank you so much! So those are all the questions that I had! Is there anything you'd like to add or words you'd leave listeners with?

NFNP: The only thing I haven't mentioned is that at the end of this month, the government is scheduled to make a decision about which company they're gonna give the contract to to build the new prison. And depending on who that is I'm sure there will be actions coming up! So if you wanna keep up on what's happening with the struggle you can go to stopponslaprison.info, it's a clearing house for information about the construction of the prison as well as resistance against it. Or you can follow us on Facebook and you can send us an email at nifrontiersniprison@riseup.net if you wanna get involved.

TFSR: Is there anything that we missed that you wanted to give more voice to or present here?

NFNP: No I think we covered it! Thanks so much for the time and for taking an interest in this struggle!

TFSR: Yeah! I think that the world has always been moving toward something like this and shit like this has happened before, and thank you for the work that you do and your time in coming onto the radio.

it's at right now. So you don't have to go if you can't go to a public demonstration.

TFSR: It makes sense cause it is a "safer" way to participate in showing dissent.

NFNP: Yeah! And also we can't rely on mainstream corporate media to relay a message to these companies that there is widespread opposition to the practice of incarcerating migrants, like we need to do that ourselves! And what that looks like is actually going and disrupting their events and their meetings, and showing up at their workplaces. But it also means calling them incessantly and sending them endless faxes with lots of black ink. To let them know that this is the wrong move for them, and if they make it things like this will probably increase, and that's generally the thinking behind it.



The Final Straw Radio / Decolonizing Prison Abolition

more in depth about it because I'm worried I'll get something wrong.

TFSR: That's totally fine. So you talked a little bit about how it got started, in what ways have people already been resisting the prison?

NFNP: Right, so in 2017 the government hired two architecture firms, one called Lamais one called Group A, to design the new prison. And Solidarity Across Borders, which is a migrant justice network that's been based here in occupied Tio'tia:ke for over 15 years now, was one of the first groups to talk publicly about this, which brought the project to a lot of people's attention including myself. And the resistance since then has been focused on the companies working on the project. Last year, an anonymous group released crickets into Lamais' headquarters, that was great! A nice biblical flourish!

And last month the group I'm a part of, Ni frontiers ni prisons, organized a demonstration against Lamais that ended at their headquarters. Since then, a company that remediated the soil at the proposed construction site had their offices spray painted, and just a few weeks ago a group of about 30 people barricaded the road leading to what was called the "site visit" for companies who want to bid on the contract to build the prison. So that's a bit of an overview of what's been happening. Ni Frontiers Ni Prison which I'm a part of is focused more on organizing public actions and events which are just one part of the struggle against the construction of the prison which includes a diversity of tactics in multiple groups.

TFSR: Does the group work in coalition with other groups that are fighting the prison or people that are detained in the prison?

NFNP: So there's no formal coalition but there is dialogue and discussion between other groups who are also doing work against

The Final Straw Radio / Decolonizing Prison Abolition

this specific prison but also against migrant detention more generally, working for status for all against the border. And so Solidarity Across Borders is a group that includes many people without status, many people who have been through the current migrant detention center and have been doing that work for a very long time.

TFSR: So, I would really love to get a sense, and maybe listeners already know these things based on their own experiences, but what would this prison mean for those people who would be most directly affected by it?

NFNP: Right, so the first thing I should say is that migrant detention is central to Canada's ability to deport people. And the CBSA has made a commitment recently to start increasing deportations by about 30%. So this prison represents an investment in both the continued violence of deportation as well as detention. But in practical terms, strengthening that threat of violence means that it'll continue to be almost impossible to seek services here, or to resist exploitation. It maintains them as a source of precarious and exploitable labor.

But I mean, the violence of the migrant prison itself can't be understated, people are often imprisoned in these facilities for years without charge. People die in these facilities, and I believe very strongly that prisons aren't the answer to the challenges we face in our communities; locking people up, limiting people's movement, deporting people to dangerous situations, or possible death, all of these things only cause more violence and harm.

Speaking for myself, I want to live in a world without prisons and without borders where people actually have the things they need to live their lives with dignity and respect.

TFSR: Definitely, and it's been my understanding too. In the US as well prisons are a huge source of capitaistic gain and a source of precarious and exploitable labor like you mentioned so that makes a lot of sense just for me coming from a US context.

TFSR: I wonder if you have any words about the importance of the call in campaign, cause I think that many anarchists, at least many anarchists that I know are a little bit hesitant to do call in campaigns, would you talk about the importance of that tactic?

NFNP: Oh sure! I mean, I can talk about it in context to our strategy here, we decided to focus on the call in campaign after an action that happened disrupting a site visit that the CBSA organized to talk with the people interested in bidding on the contract to build the prison. And so people went there and disrupted it, and there were a lot of conversations with workers from the companies who had been sent there to talk with the CBSA about the contract. And some of those conversations went really well! What we're trying to do in this phase before the general contractor is chosen to build the prison, is to let all the companies know who are considering doing this work that there will be resistance if they decide to take that contract. To let them know that it may be in their financial best interest to walk away from this project. And that strategy will continue depending on what company is chosen, but obviously the tactics will shift.

TFSR: I'm also really interested in hearing any words that you have about like the nature of the tactic of a call in campaign. Maybe this is a bit of a circular or esoteric question but I'm wanting to like provide people with some sort of way to mentally grasp on to what is being achieved here and what is being proposed, and what the goals are generally of something like that?

Is it just annoyance or--

NFNP: Well there are multiple reasons for it, like on one side of it there is the effect of heightening the contradictions that actually already exist within some of these companies in relationship to projects like this. Of creating a sense of wariness on the part of these companies about embarking, but it also gives a way for organizations and for individuals to engage with the struggle at the faze that

NFNP: Well, not people who are indigenous to the territories governed by the Canadian state, but people who are indigenous to like other areas on the continent who are then displaced and would not be understood or classified by the Canadian state as their indigenous identity based on the country of origin.

TFSR: Yeah for sure! The border is a colonial construct, and the indigenous territories obviously vastly predate that colonial construct.

So, how can people support the group that you are speaking from, Ni Frontiers Ni Prison, and could you also brainstorm modes of support that folks can enact who, for whatever reason, are not in a position to do confrontational or legally risky direct action?

NFNP: Oh yeah for sure! So this month we actually have a call in campaign, where we're encouraging folks to either call, email, or fax the companies who are currently bidding for the contract to build this new prison. So we highly encourage anyone who would like to to do this, you can go on our Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/nifrontieresnprisns/>, and you'll see the information about the call in campaign there.

But in terms of non risky ways to participate in struggle like this, the group I'm a part of we do public actions, and the demonstrations we've organized so far have been very low risk, very family friendly to quote maybe an outdated activist parlance. We have been helping organize information sessions in neighborhoods across the city in partnership with different groups, artists have contributed a series of posters which people have been helping put up across the city, people have made videos about the struggle against the prison, or written articles, there's a lot of ways that people have contributed and continue to and to participate in this that isn't particularly high risk. Particularly right now we could actually use some help spreading word about the struggle and why we're in opposition to the prison.

So at the radio show we've been hearing about this prison couched in terms of humanity, like it would be a so called "more humane detention center". And you mentioned that it was being built like right across the street or right next to a detention center that already exists. Would you talk about why the Canadian state is attempting this branding right now?

NFNP: Yeah, so the government has been marketing this entire project as creating a more humane approach to incarcerating migrants, but it's just an attempt to change the subject from the question of why the government is putting migrants in prison to begin with, something a lot of people started asking following the hunger strikes. And if you look at the designs that the architects put together it makes it really clear what's actually going on, like the plans talk about how all the fencing around the prison needs to be covered by foliage to limit what it calls "the harshness of the look", or that the iron bars over the windows have to be as inconspicuous as possible to the outside public, and that the children's area needs to be bordered by what they call a 6 foot high visual barrier to make sure that no one outside can see the imprisoned children.

So essentially it's just a new prison with a nicer looking face. And if you're being separated from your family, your community, awaiting deportation to possible torture or death, I highly doubt you're gonna be too concerned with how sustainable the concrete is or what color the ceilings are in the prison you're being held in. But another element of this plan is something that the government is marketing as "alternatives to detention". I mean, these programs only make up something like 3% of the total budget of the plan, but it's been a central part of its marketing as a more humane approach than the previous government. These alternatives, they include forcing migrants to wear electronic ankle bracelets so their movements can be tracked. There's this collaboration with the John Howard Society to force migrants into their halfway houses, they've also created this gps phone reporting system that forces migrants to make

regular check in calls that test their voice prints. And so these are all ways that the government is actually expanding its capacity for surveillance and control of migrants outside of its prisons. Ya know, before the only option was detaining or releasing people but now they're expanding their reach. And there was actually a renewed hunger strike by incarcerated migrants when these alternatives were launched last year, but again the government just ignored them.

TFSR: And I'm assuming that the halfway house that you mentioned as well as the ankle bracelets, are those a for profit endeavor?

NFNP: So yeah, the halfway houses, the John Howard Society, got a multi million dollar contract to oversee that project. I'm not sure offhand what the company is that's overseeing the ankle bracelets, but the technology was actually engineered as part of the post 9/11 national security certificate program here, which involved imprisoning non-citizens indefinitely without charge on secret evidence, mostly it was Arab and Muslim men. And some of those men who were caught up in the system in the early 2000's, they actually requested to be transferred back to prison rather than continuing to live with those ankle monitors, because of how intense and repressive that system really was. But it's really clear with these alternatives that all these carceral technologies that have been used in these post 9/11 sort of state of exception moments, but also through the federal prison system are leaking in and bleeding in to the system of how Canada relates to migrant populations.

W: It's like bringing the prison into the home is kinda my experience of how ankle monitors generally work. And I'm really bothered by this entire situation, but also this sort of softer, gentler prison where you can't really see the kids and the harshness of the prison is dulled by some kind of fake foliage. The quality of the Canadian state is something that as a US resident I'm not really all that informed about but what I have been informed of,

NFNP: Right! So the most influential border around us here in occupied Tio'tia:ke is the American border, which is very close by. And about two hours east of us here is Akwesasne (a-kwa-sas'-nay), which is Kanienkiahaka (kan-eh-ga-hag'-ay) territory, this territory additionally is recognized as a federal reserve. Tio'tia:ke is also Kanienkiahaka territory but isn't federally recognized as such. Akwasasne itself is actually cut in two by that border, and there's been conflict for decades there between the CBSA who attempt to enforce that border and indigenous people who refuse to acknowledge their authority on their territory.

So anyway, all this is to say that it's very clear here the ways that the borders around us are fairly recent colonial constructions. But since we're talking about prisons, in Canada incarceration as a practice was largely spread as part of the ongoing genocide against indigenous peoples, as a tool of assimilation. And today when you look at who's inside Canadian prisons, indigenous people are disproportionately represented.

And so, the same colonial and capitalist forces that are creating war, poverty, destruction, throughout the global South are continuing to oversee the genocide and dispossession of Indigenous peoples here in the global North. Many people being displaced and arriving to this territory are indigenous to different areas on this continent and many of them are ending up in these migrant prisons.

But over the last decade or so here, different migrant justice formations have gone through processes of dialogue and discussion with indigenous groups. Which has led to some changes in messaging and outlook over time and I mean, we've been influenced by this too, but as settlers we have a lot more work to do on this front I think.

TFSR: Definitely, did I understand you correctly that indigenous folks are being incarcerated in these migrant jails?

al government to follow through on deportations in many ways. But I came across the term “solidarity city” in articles on your website, would you talk about the distinction between the two, and what is meant by “solidarity city”?

NFNP: Oh sure! So this is actually a framing that comes out of the work of Solidarity Across Borders. Sanctuary city campaigns, they tend to be focused on asking the municipal government to protect people without status. But for years now, Solidarity Across Borders has put forward the analysis that we should be creating our own networks of mutual aid and solidarity. And a good example for this is the police, y’know at least here the police are one of the biggest problems that undocumented migrants face. And that problem doesn’t go away with city officials signing a sanctuary city declaration. The last mayor here actually announced that Montreal was a sanctuary city, but nothing changed. The police continued to collaborate with the CBSA to detain and deport people.

But a solidarity city is different because it’s something that’s built from the ground up, through building networks of resistance and non-cooperation with those agencies that enforce deportations and detentions, not by appealing to power.

TFSR: Yeah, I think that building from the ground up while at the same time refusing cooperation is sparking something in my head. Thanks for talking about that!

NFNP: Yeah no problem! You can check out more at Solidarity Across Border’s website which is <http://www.solidarityacrossborders.org/en/> for english.

TFSR: So would you speak about this struggle in terms of decolonization? What are some parallels that you can locate between decolonization and a project that has a more anti-border ethic?

it’s just like extraordinarily toxic neoliberal cooptation of like “diversity” and “understanding” when it in fact is a genocidal machine.

NFNP: Yeah I think that was very well put!

TFSR: I’ve been listening to a lot of From Embers (anarchist radio show at <http://fromembers.libsyn.com/>) so I’ve been like “this fucking Canadian state is a fucking hellscape!” But yeah thank you for going into that, the ankle bracelets and the for profit nature of the John Howard Society.

So, speaking of the state, I think that people all over the world have been noting the increasingly frenetic attention that governments are paying to borders, with similarly increasingly racist rhetoric applied to many people seeking safety in places like so called Canada, so called US, and UK. Are there things to keep in mind about this proposed detention center in this current polarizing climate?

NFNP: Right. So over the past few years in Quebec we’ve seen the rise of far right anti-immigrant groups that have actually achieved a level of mass support here that I think is unique compared to the rest of the country. And this is for a lot of reasons, an important one is the turn of Quebec nationalism toward a very xenophobic form of state secularism. And that’s resulted in a huge increase of attacks on Muslim people, a formal ban on anyone wearing non Christian religious symbols from either working or receiving services from the Quebec government--

TFSR: Wait, really??

NFNP: Yeah... And also of course there’s the mass murder at the Islamic Cultural Center in Quebec City. But it’s also resulted in a new far right government that ran on substantially reducing immi-

gration to Quebec and also introducing values and language tests for new migrants, which they've begun to put in place. And so, this more I guess local far right upsurge in anti-immigrant sentiment is increasingly bolstering support here for the federal government's deportation regime.

And I think this makes it an important moment to intervene, to help disrupt that. Because I think that fighting back against the rise of the sentiment needs to be more than a one pronged fight against the far right groups on the ground. I really think that the struggle also needs to be connected to sustained resistance toward the racist structures that pre-date these groups. These structures often share a vision with these newer far right groups, but I think there may be more fundamental parts of our colonial context here.

TFSR: Yeah, definitely! I'm wondering if you would say more about fighting against the structures that pre-date the current governmental climate, or political climate that's happening right now? What would you think would be involved in that?

NFNP: Oh! Well I think that migration policy is a great example of this, where so much of the focus of that conversation around the country and in Quebec right now is so focused around people crossing the border from the United States on foot into Canada. And talking about the influx of refugees who are crossing into Canada or applying for refugee status here, many of which are being denied.

But the entire apparatus of detention and deportation completely pre-dates this. It's in fact not linked to this upsurge in migration, it's linked to the temporization of status for people here, which has been going back for decades. And if we're only looking at what's directly in front of us, we're not gonna understand or be able to effectively confront these structures that are MUCH more deeply rooted in the fabric of the Canadian state and in Canadian history.

TFSR: Thank you very much for bringing up that point! And I think that goes really well into the next questions which is, would you talk about how the concept of citizenship is being weaponized by the state in this case but also has always been weaponized by the state?

NFNP: Yeah, I mean the concept of citizenship has always been based on exclusion, and the Canadian context is no different! Things like the Chinese Head Tax, the Komagata Maru incident, the None is Too Many Policy toward Jewish refugees fleeing the Holocaust, the Canadian state's approach to immigration has always been shaped by its white supremacist foundations. And actually with the exception of the British Commonwealth countries, Canada had an official 'whites only' immigration policy until the '60s. But since the 1960's the government, like I was saying, it's been increasingly temporizing the status of people coming here. It's gotten to the point where now over 2/3rds of people who are granted status to live and work here each year are getting some form of temporary status.

And so the CBSA's migrant detention and deportation apparatus was built to enforce this, it was a necessary by-product of these changes. And that system is part of maintaining the flow of wealth from the global South to the global North. Workers from the global South come here, have their labor exploited at extreme levels, put huge sums of money into the Canadian economy, and then they're kicked out. And Canada doesn't just benefit from this but it actively participates in impoverishing and displacing people in the global South who then end up their doorstep.

TFSR: Definitely, I think there's a lot to talk about there but I think you gave a really good summary. And I think that I would love to move on to some other questions which have to do with the more positive aspects of the resistance to this thing. So, we in the states are familiar with the concept of a sanctuary city, which indicates that a place limits their cooperation with the nation-